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AUTHOR Reed, Bobette P.; Dandridge, William L.
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ABSTRACT

To help improve private schools' recruitment of minority students, this handbook discusses where and how to begin, recruitment strategies, applicant assessment, and the need for in-school support systems for minority students. The authors stress that each school should begin by analyzing its own objectives, attitudes, and admission program. Included in this analysis should be examinations of the school's goals and motivations in recruiting minority students, its commitment to racial diversity, its responsibilities and resources, the experiences of its past minority students, and the attitudes of its admissions staff. In discussing recruitment strategies, the authors recommend using minority parents, organizations, and other resources. They make ten suggestions on how to inform resource people about the school. The handbook's review of minority applicant assessment looks at school expectations and standards, admissions interviews, transcripts, references, standardized tests, other predictors of school success, and financial aid. Support systems for minority students, say the authors, should include older minority students, minority parents, and adult role models and should take into consideration faculty perceptions of students, student advisers, skills improvement, and maintenance of racial identity. (RW)

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Recruiting Minority Students

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Bobette P. Reed

William L. Dandridge

NAIS

National Association of Independent Schools
4 Liberty Square, Boston, Massachusetts 02109

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I. RECRUITING MINORITY STUDENTS

The National Association of Independent Schools seeks to expand opportunities for minority students in its member schools. The information presented here is intended to help independent school admission officers and staff to conduct more effective recruitment programs and, of equal importance, to improve the quality of their evaluations of minority applicants.

"Minority," as used here, means "racial minority" - Black, Hispanic (Puerto Rican, Mexican American), Native American (American Indian, Eskimo), and Asian American (Chinese, Japanese, Pacific Islander). Our suggestions may be useful for "other" minorities and for any family having its first contact with independent schools.

One important observation must be stated at the beginning. To develop a successful recruitment program, a school must begin with a thorough examination of its regular admission program to determine its sensitivity to each applicant. Devising a separate admission program for minority applicants with special procedures and different criteria is a questionable and inappropriate practice. Students recruited this way face an uncertain future, with little chance for successfully completing the school's program.

The questions and suggestions were gathered from the NAIS Admissions Committee, the NAIS Minority Affairs Committee, representatives of A Better Chance, Inc., and the Black Student Fund, directors of admission, minority teachers and parents, and others who share our concern for expanding the presence of minority children in independent schools.

Recruiting Minority Students: Where To Begin and How

We begin with questions for assessing your school's present objectives and attitudes. Understanding your present admission program is a critical step. We then offer specific suggestions on recruiting minority students.

(1) Why should you recruit minority students? What do you know about your present admissions program? The following statements provide an important rationale.

> Every school within our nation's context has an imperative mission: to help prepare its students for life in a society composed of many different cultural, racial, and ethnic strands. The extent to which the school equips its young people to work and to live within a country characterized by an assortment of races, cultures, and life styles, each mutually celebrated is an important indicator of its relevance to contemporary youth and its overall quality.[1]

> The Board of Directors of the National Association of Independent Schools reaffirms its position, stated originally in 1974, that independent education must reflect the racial, ethnic and cultural pluralism which is a distinctive quality of American society.
>
> In active pursuit of this principle, we the Directors of NAIS, commit ourselves to a policy of promoting this principle in the Association's activities, programs, staff composition, and procedural practices; and we urge our member schools and associations to undertake a similar commitment.[2]

If children are given opportunities to develop interracial and cross cultural relationships in a concerned school setting, they will develop important insights and understandings that will prepare them to live full and productive lives in our multiracial society.

[1]Introduction to Evaluation Guidelines for Multi-Cultural/Multi-Racial Education, published by the National Study of School Evaluation, Arlington, Virginia.

[2]This statement, which was adopted in November 1978, is a revision of an earlier policy statement (June 1974) that supported several broader statements and programs initiated by the NAIS Board of Directors between 1966 and 1970.

Two important conditions for establishing a positive school environment are reasonable numbers of minority students and of minority teachers. There must be sufficient numbers of minority students to provide a sense of "community" among themselves as well as to afford nonminority students many contacts. The presence of minority adults - teachers, administrators, and trustees - as role models is the other critical factor.

(2) What is the school's policy on and commitment to racial diversity? Who is interested? Who is opposed? What is each group's degree of interest? How have they made their concerns known to the school and local community? What is the attitude of the trustees, head, administrators, teachers, students, and parents? All of these groups are important, but the active leadership of the trustees and head is critical. No program can succeed without them.

When there is opposition it is important to determine why. Lack of information or confusion about the school's objectives may be two possible reasons. Do parents believe that they are supporting the scholarship program through the tuition they pay for their children? Are parents concerned that the school may be accepting "less qualified" students? You can remedy these uncertainties through regular announcements to parents, teachers, and others about the school's admission criteria, financial aid (sources), etc.

(3) What objectives have been established? By whom? By what process? Who is responsible? What resources have been allocated to the program? It is important that the school develop a statement of its objectives. The objectives should be stated in clear and measurable terms so that each trustee, administrator, teacher, student, and parent understands what is expected of him or her. For teachers, departments, and divisions (preschool, lower, secondary, etc.), the statement should request specific information on how each plans to implement the school's objectives. The statement of

objectives and reports from the staff and departments should be reviewed every year. Periodic reviews provide the important assurance that areas reporting little or no progress will be identified and appropriate remedies applied.

A senior administrator, preferably the school head, should be assigned to direct and coordinate the program. A trustee-faculty committee can provide valuable support to the board and school head in implementing a minority affairs program.

(4) What has been the experience of minority students at your school? Have you discussed this with them? Are your minority graduates active in alumni affairs? Are they willing to help you? Are your present minority students active in school academic and social activities, or do they restrict themselves to certain activities, such as athletics? Discussions with minority students individually and in small groups will help you prepare to recruit other minority students by revealing whatever problems exist and giving you an opportunity to make appropriate adjustments.

(5) An important part of any program to recruit new students is the awareness and sensitivity of the entire admissions office staff - receptionists, secretaries, guides, interviewers. Their attitudes, assumptions, and behavior should be reviewed. Their support is vital.

Recruiting Strategies

(1) What are proven recruitment sources? The parents of your present minority students, public school counselors and teachers, directors of church and social service youth programs, directors of day care centers and summer camps, youth services directory for model cities programs can be some of your best sources.

A Better Chance and the Black Student Fund provide a good base for

building your own program. They offer support, information, and general counseling for their students and member schools. Special remedial and enrichment programs sponsored by independent schools are an additional source.

Boys' clubs, settlement houses, Big Brothers and Sisters, ASPIRA of America , the National Junior Tennis League, tutoring centers for anti poverty agencies, and alternative and community schools in minority communities are other excellent sources. In some instances, these organizations provide partial financial assistance for students to attend your school.

(2) How can you inform resource people about your school? Resource people want to do the best possible job they can, but they need to know about your school. We suggest the following for helping resource people to help you.

(a) Start small. Select five or six resource people in or near the areas where you presently recruit.

(b) Look at the minority enrollment of your feeder schools. If they have minority students, find out where they go on to school. And tell the schools you would like to talk to their minority students. Don't assume they know about your minority recruitment program. Tell them.

(c) Invite resource people to visit your school to talk with teachers and students, to observe classes, and see the facilities. The tone of the school - student-teacher and student-to-student relations - which is impossible to capture from any catalogue, is important. Boarding schools may find this an especially worthwhile way of finding good students who can profit from the experience at their school.

(d) Put the resource people on your mailing list. Send them everything you publish (catalogue, alumni publications, student newspapers, reports from the school head, etc.). Treat them like potential donors. They are.

(e) Invite them to school activities - plays, concerts, lectures, exhibits. When they send you a student, invite them to programs that involve "their" student. Let them share in the student's success.

(f) During your discussions, stress qualities and talents that students must have to be successful in your school (above average reading ability, athletics, art, science, etc.).

(g) Emphasize special demands that are made on students (Saturday classes and activities, homework load, number of courses required per term, length and pace of typical school day, etc.).

(h) Provide information on the school's (and community's) social and cultural environment. Are there special social functions (such as a spring dance) that involve many of the school's students? How might these activities affect who receive financial aid? Such information can help the resource person to be realistic in counseling the students they refer and thus, one hopes, reduce the culture shock.

(i) Be sure to include in your discussions other special school programs that require additional expense for the student and his family - such as study/travel abroad, music and dance lessons, tutoring, and student exchange programs. How these expenses may be paid is important. Does the school offer additional aid? What happens to students who do not

participate in these activities? With sufficient notification, perhaps the family and/or resource person can find a way to handle this kind of additional expense.

(j) Keep in touch with resource people:

(1) Alert a resource person as soon as you have questions or doubts about the appropriateness of your school for "their" student, and

(2) give detailed explanations when you reject a student. Use this as a "counseling" opportunity to explain your reasons for rejecting the student, suggest ways in which they might identify stronger candidates, and offer suggestions and other alternatives. Is there another independent school in the area that would be better for the child?

(3) What should you expect from resource people? First, careful prescreening of students. They should arrange meetings only with students who they feel can handle the demands of independent schools. Mass meetings preceded by little or no preparation are a poor way to approach recruiting. Resource people should be willing to support your contacts with the family, and participate in discussions of academic or disciplinary problems.

During your recruiting program you may discover that other independent school representatives have been there before you. This may suggest the need for a cooperative recruiting effort with the schools in your area. Cooperative programs can provide more information on independent education, give resource people and families a meaningful base for comparison and choice, and save everyone time and money.

One final suggestion is for you to explore new sources of minority students. If you try to identify at least one new source every other year, you may find many new candidates. And, should some of these students not

be right for your school, tell your neighbors so that they can follow up. Minority newspapers and magazines (especially the community news section) can provide lots of information. Sending minority newspapers information on your school's activities and advertising your nondiscriminatory admissions policy are two good ways to open channels to this important source.

II. ASSESSING MINORITY APPLICANTS

This section should be shared with every member of your admission committee to alert them to procedures, assumptions, and attitudes that screen out minority students who might be considered acceptable if additional factors are considered. These brief comments are intended only to highlight some of the more common problems. Those wishing more detailed information should consult the bibliography.

(1) What should you look for when evaluating minority applicants? Expectations for minority and white candidates should be the same. However, you should use different indicators and emphasize different factors, in a general way, to broaden your evaluation procedures to allow minority candidates who may have had different educational and life experiences more ways to establish their readiness for your school.

We are concerned that some schools require more of their minority applicants than they do of others. We are equally concerned by schools that unnecessarily lower or alter their admission criteria for minority students. Schools that expect more from their minority applicants seem to want greater assurance that the students can "adjust" to the school's predominantly white and upper income environment. We know of no way to make this judgment. More important, we believe this question must be left to the minority student and his family for resolution. If they have been given all pertinent information about the school, then you must accept their decision.

Lowering standards is totally unacceptable. The issue is how you define standards. The admissions officer's job is to predict success. It is clear that traditional methods of defining "standards" have left out candidates who, if other means of assessment were available, would be successful. The task, then, is to develop a different set of criteria for predicting success.

Annual reviews of your present students' test scores, and other records is a good way to be sure your impression, as you express them in your recruitment contacts, are accurate. What is the real "range" of interests and abilities in your student population? How much academic and social diversity can the school accommodate?

(2) How important and reliable is your admissions interview? We urge interviewers to read what follows before they interview minority applicants and again before preparing their interview report.

(a) What is the purpose of an admissions interview?

(b) The setting - is it comfortable, informal, or is there a better site that is familiar to the candidates, such as the resource person's office, or the sending school?

(c) Has the resource person given you enough information so that you can start a relaxed conversation about special interests, hobbies, or projects?

(d) Has the candidate had other, similar experiences so that he or she understands the purpose of the interview and what is expected of him or her?

Another important factor that is generally overlooked is the attitude, assumptions, and sensitivity of the interviewer toward minority groups. Does the interviewer assume or expect minority applicants to be less well prepared than white candidates? Is the interviewer comfortable and confident in working with minority children and their parents? Has the interviewer had experiences that might help him or her to empathize with minority families? Does the interviewer convey a sense of warmth and concern on behalf of the school?

(3) How reliable are public school transcripts? In our conversations with admissions officers, we noted a strong feeling that public school

transcripts were too spotty and incomplete, and gave far too little information for conducting a proper assessment. Public schools in larger metropolitan areas seemed to be the chief culprits. Is an "A" student from an inner city public school a good candidate, or are the grades inflated? If so, what can we expect of "B" and "C" students? An "A" student in most if not all situations should be able to meet the demands of independent schools. They may not and probably should not expect to receive all "A's" in an independent school, but they are low risk candidates. As the average goes down - "B+", "B-", "C+" - the chances for success decrease. In these situations you should be more demanding about the other information you receive.

Unless the independent school gains a clear understanding of the sending school's strength, the child will be penalized. Resource people (particularly public school counselors and teachers) can help you <u>if</u> you give them sufficient information on <u>your</u> school. Many times resource people have access to information that is not appropriate for transcripts and may not show up in references. It may be difficult for them to spell out all the details that support their impressions, but their suggestions should be given every possible consideration. A personal interview or relaxed telephone contact can be very helpful.

(4) Reliable references are another thorny issue. Many families new to independent schools may select "prominent" friends who have little direct contact with the child, and who may know little or nothing about independent schools. Schools should provide guidance and direction about people who should be asked to provide information on the child and family. Again, the resource person can be helpful.

(5) Testing is the most sensitive and emotionally charged part of the admission process. Many minority people are suspicious of tests of all types.

Given the numerous cases of test misuse and culturally biased tests that have been documented, negative reaction to the very mention of a standardized test is understandable.

It is important for the interviewer to recognize the sensitivity that surrounds the use of tests and to explain as clearly as possible the test to be administered and how it will be used by the school. It is equally important for anyone who reads the minority applicant's folder to recognize the additional burden that minority students carry into the test situation.

The concern for culturally biased tests is complicated further because minority children as a group tend to score below their white peers on most group-administered standardized tests, both aptitude and achievement. The question is how can we proceed with testing without penalizing minority children.

The following observations are provided by schools that have worked with substantial numbers of minority children.

(a) The admissions committee should review the test publisher's statement on the test's purpose and use on a regular basis. If the school is using the test in a way that is not recommended by the test publisher, it may be subjecting all of its prospective students to an unfair and destructive experience. When a minority student is involved, a delicate situation is made worse.

(b) It is important to remember that standardized tests measure the life and educational experience of a specially selected group - a norming sample. Children from cultural or racial groups that were not included in the norming sample may be penalized simply because of their different backgrounds. There is abundant evidence to support the charges of culturally biased tests.

Therefore, it is vital for you to use tests that include different racial groups in their norming sample.

(c) References, transcripts, and grades should be reviewed before test scores are considered. When a test score is at odds with the other information, the type of test, the test setting, and the applicant's educational and life experiences should be re-examined to resolve the conflicting information.

(d) The math and reading comprehension sections of tests may be better, or more reliable, predictors for minority children than language usage sections. Subtle distinction in tone, inflection, and usage in special situations can present major problems for minority children in taking language usage tests.

(e) While the difference in test scores for racial or cultural groups is important, the range of scores within each group is of equal importance. Minority students who score at or near the top of the range for their group should be viewed as good prospects, even though their score may fall somewhat lower on the scale for white students.

(f) Individually administered tests (see next section) are better for assessing minority children than group-administered standardized tests, for they give the administrator the opportunity to "see the child at work." It is important to know whether the child understands the testing process, works quickly and confidently, is easily distracted and frustrated, or feels threatened by the pressure of a timed test. This information should be included in the test administrator's report.

Here are suggestions for those who use tests.

At the preschool and kindergarten level the McCarthy Scale, Meeting Street, and the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI) are the most reliable predictors for minority children.

The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children - Revised (WISC-R) is the best predictor for minority children in the 6 to 17 year age range because minority children were included in the norming group.

A new test designed specifically to include children of different racial and cultural groups is the System of Multi-Cultural Pluralistic Assessment (SOMPA). The test developer, Dr. Jane Mercer, of the University of California at Riverside, has worked extensively with Hispanic and Black children and developed SOMPA in response to the abusive treatment of minority children who were labeled "deprived," "underachievers," and "retarded" by culturally biased tests. (See bibliography for more information.)

Most independent secondary schools use the Secondary School Admission Test (SSAT) or the aptitude test battery of the Educational Records Bureau. To date, neither organization has studied the predictive reliability of their tests for minority students. Schools that use both tests report that minority students, as a group, seem to score below their white applicants. The significance and degree of difference in the scores are impossible to evaluate and contain too little information to offer conclusions. We urge you to review the admissions scores of present and former minority students who successfully managed the school's academic expectations. You may find clues that will offer you guidance on how to proceed with future minority applicants.

We want to remind you that tests are not infallible. When they are used properly they can be helpful tools, so review the publisher's statement of purpose. For admissions purposes, tests should be used only in conjunction with the other information about the child.

Most tests measure life and educational experiences, but they do not measure coping skills. A child who has made the best of a weak and undemanding school, and who has developed skills to function effectively at home and in his neighborhood, can be a "good risk." A resource person who knows the child, school, and neighborhood can help you.

If you test a child and decide to admit him (or her) but feel he should enter at a lower level, tell him this face to face so that you can explain all the reasons fully and answer his questions. Otherwise, the school's suggestion may be interpreted as a punitive act. For the child who has been successful in school (good grades) and at home, this could be a serious blow to his ego.

Once you have interviewed and tested a child, and decided to accept him, make him an involved member of your school. If weaknesses have been identified during the evaluation process, build support for the child by finding a tutor, encouraging the child to attend your summer school, or selecting a sensitive adviser.

(6) What are some other reliable indicators of potential? Children who have developed skills as leaders of community groups (formal or informal), bear responsibility for younger brothers and sisters, participate actively in church groups, and the like are highly motivated, and this should be considered by the admissions committee. Again, a review of the admissions scores for minority students who have attended your school and been successful can help you identify additional indicators for evaluating minority applicants.

(7) Should schools give special consideration to minority applicants for financial aid? Is the School Scholarship Service (SSS) form appropriate for minority families, especially those who live in the inner city? Should schools pay interview expenses? How can schools secure family financial

information without appearing nosey or seeming to prejudge the applicant?

There is too little information to help us answer these questions. We suspect the availability of financial aid has a major influence on a school's ability to increase its minority enrollment. A straightforward discussion of your financial aid program makes the most sense. Be sure to include information on the source of funds, percentage of students receiving some form of aid, and criteria for determining the amount of each award. The SSS form can be difficult and frightening for those who are trying to complete it for the first time. Your conversation should include an offer to help parents complete the form.

From a minority perspective, there are concerns about the "hidden" costs of living in inner city areas. Higher auto and home insurance rates, and, in some instances, higher costs for basic services and commodities, can generate major concerns. Again, a straightforward discussion of the purpose of the SSS form and the confidentiality with which it is processed may resolve many of these questions.

III. CREATING A SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR MINORITY STUDENTS

Once the school decides to accept the minority applicant, it should consider an orientation program and "support system." We hasten to add that not all minority students need a support system; that depends upon their life and educational experiences. However, the question should be considered immediately after the admission decision is made. For students who require support, here are suggestions we hope will be useful.

(1) What do you do once the student is enrolled? You may want to ask older minority students to be big brothers and sisters to new minority students. A chance for informal discussion before school opens is important. New minority parents may also welcome the opportunity to meet and talk with other minority parents. You should ask a minority parent to contact a new family to talk about the school (transportation to school, parent association activities, neighbors who have children attending the school, homework).

(2) If you have identified weaknesses in the applicant's background during the admissions process, what should you do next? Lots of thought should be given to developing a program to help the new student catch up. You may need to arrange tutoring or encourage him to attend your summer school. Occasionally you may find it necessary to ask the student to repeat a grade. Should you decide that repeating a year would substantially improve the child's chances for success, arrange another meeting with the family and present your suggestion in person.

(3) What you tell the faculty about the new student is important also. Inner city, disadvantaged (without further clarification), and other "code" words can influence the faculty's perception and expectations for the new student.

(4) The selection of academic and residence advisers is critical. You need people who can empathize with the student and provide encouragement and

support, truly expecting the student to be successful.

(5) Does the school offer role models and other adult supports. What effect should this have on your assessment process and admissions decision? Role models are important. Schools that enroll minority students should have minority adults on campus. Given the small number of minority teachers in independent schools, the chances are great that most schools will not have minority role models. The employment of minority teachers is a separate issue from recruiting minority students, and admissions decisions should not be affected adversely. However, a growing minority enrollment will put added pressure on the school to employ minority teachers.

(6) How can you help minority students maintain their racial identity? One must be careful in formulating a definition or vision (stereotype) for racial identity. While there are many areas of "shared experience," there are also important areas of individual difference. Schools must find ways to be flexible, to allow the individual student to sort this out. An important part of this sorting is the number of minority students attending the school. Numbers are important. And, the socioeconomic diversity of both minority and majority students is equally important. There must be a sufficient number to provide a sense of identity and group support. There must also be the opportunity to form relationships with those who share social and cultural experiences.

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